

Message from Archbishop Makarios of Australia for the 85th Anniversary of the Battle of Crete



This year marks eighty-five years since those glorious days of May 1941, when the proud people of Crete stood united with faith, courage, and determination against a vastly powerful invading force. From the very beginning, the struggle appeared hopelessly unequal. Yet surrendering their ancestral land without a fight was foreign to the spirit of those “unconquered and unyielding souls,” as Nikos Kazantzakis so memorably described them. Setting aside fear and every personal concern, our heroic forebears – ordinary men and women of all ages – confronted the invaders with extraordinary bravery, defending their freedom and dignity with complete self-sacrifice.

For the nations that at that same time had fallen under Axis occupation, the heroic resistance of the Cretan people became a beacon of hope. It strengthened the resolve of all those who continued the fight so that the darkness of Nazism would not prevail. For this reason, the historic Battle of Crete has been remembered, and will continue to be remembered, far beyond the borders of our motherland.

Above all, it is commemorated and will forever be commemorated here in the furthest reaches of the southern hemisphere, in Australia and New Zealand, nations bound to Greece, and particularly to Crete, through ties of blood and shared

sacrifice. We do not forget that the soil of Crete is the resting place of hundreds of ANZAC servicemen, among the thousands who fought with extraordinary selflessness in a land many thousands of kilometres from their own homes. Nor do we forget that, following the occupation of the island, countless Cretans sheltered, cared for, concealed, and helped Australian and New Zealand soldiers escape, despite the grave danger this posed to themselves and their families.

These were acts that witnessed to profound greatness of soul on both sides; acts that transcend self-interest and fleeting concerns and reveal high ideals!

Such a precious legacy has been entrusted to us by our forebears and we have a duty to preserve it and pass it on to future generations, so that we do not merely pay lip service to the heroes of the past, but also draw inspiration from their example as we face the challenges of our own times and those yet to come. For this is the true meaning of historical memory: to illuminate the present and guide the future.